Critique

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I Introduction

Critique is a central term within the lexicon of contemporary human geography. The story of the discipline has been told as a journey from a pre-critical past to a critical present, a passage from naivety to sophistication and from political conservatism to political engagement (for example, Benko and Strohmayer 2004; Nayak and Jeffrey 2011). This narrative has also been applied to particular fields within human geography. Thus, for example, the progress of geographical work in development studies and 'racial' studies has been offered as an ascent from a time when categories and processes were not questioned towards a present in which concepts, such as 'development', 'Third World', 'race' and so on, are questioned and politically framed as spatially contingent arenas of struggle (for example, Potter, *et al*. 1999; Bonnett 1996).

Three themes will already be clear from this overview. First, the centrality of the idea and ethic of critique in contemporary human geography; second, the construction of the discipline's past(s0 as relatively uncritical; and third, that the logic of critique in human geography has explicit political content. The passage to 'being critical' has been claimed as a journey not only towards scepticism but also political commitment. The politics of critique has been fundamental in shaping its focus and aims.

Thus to explore and exemplify the nature of critique in human geography we also need to explore and exemplify how critique has been politically framed and represented. Since this chapter is a critical account – a critique of how critique has been made to function in the discipline – the politics of critique will be both questioned and contextualised. Setting the rise of critique against the background of the wider rise and fall of political radicalism (from the heady days of the 1960s to the more sombre outlook of the past 30 years), I cast doubt on the utility and plausibility of the widespread conflation of critique with radical perspectives (for the sake of simplicity, where possible I use the word 'radical' throughout this essay although I treat the terms 'radical' and 'left-wing' as synonymous. I address the difficulties of defining these words at the end of this introduction). I develop this argument, along with the idea that the claim to critique has often relied on the construction of a stereotype of a 'pre-critical' past, by reference both to examples of generic commentary on the status of critique in human geography (section II) and through a number of illustrative studies of the operation of critique in particular fields within the discipline (section III).

This chapter seeks to offer a critique of the way critique has been understood and operationalized in Anglophone human geography by challenging unexamined conventions. It does not seek to displace radicalism in the discipline, a current which has done much to reinvigorate human geography and connect it with the wider world. Indeed, I consider myself a radical since I share many characteristic beliefs and assumptions about the nature of modern society. Yet these beliefs and assumptions should not become mere common sense. Today, after many years of radical ascendency, at least in some parts of the discipline, but with the

decline of radicalism in the wider world (when compared to much of the twentieth century), it is both necessary and timely to question the politics of critique.

What is critique? Kant used the term to refer to the rigorous examination of the tenets and claims of a set of philosophical ideas. For him (2010) critical thinking can be contrasted with dogmatic thinking. The latter approaches the meaning of a concept as given (determined by some broader principle) whilst the former views it as something that can and should be interrogated on its own terms. Critique, then, implies analysis, honesty and rigour. It is something to be valued. Indeed, the broad definitions of critique that we find in philosophy suggest that it is a central attribute of genuine intellectual enquiry. Irandoust (2006) makes a useful distinction between critique and criticism. Criticism he notes, suggests that we,

> remain content with passing *judgement* upon an object in a way which *reifies* the object, isolating it from its real and concrete relations with other objects. (134)

Although critique contains judgement it also offers explanation: it tells us not only that a thing is useful or useless, good or bad, but why it is as it is. Thus critique is 'intellectually serious criticism' says Irandoust. It demands that we '*evaluate on the basis of an interpretation*': it is 'criticism which judges, but which, at the same time, explains and justifies its judgement' (134).

In a lecture he delivered in 1978 called 'What is critique?' Foucault proposed a similar view of the value and explanatory function of critique (in Foucault 2007). However, he also broached its political potential. Critique is not neutral, he argued; it approaches and frames its object in terms of beliefs and aspirations.

> critique only exists in relation to something other than itself; it is an instrument, a means for a future or a truth that it will not know ... it oversees a domain it would want to police and is unable to regulate. (42)

Here we find our first hint that critique can -- perhaps must -- have a political function. For any radical critique, however, the question arises of where and how it can derive its normative content if not from the society which it seeks to challenge. It is a question that returns us to Irandoust's distinction between criticism and critique. Marxist philosophers have been at the forefront of this kind of inquiry. Thus, for example, drawing, in large part, on Marx's early examination of German idealism, Seyla Benhabib (1986) and Joe McCarney (1990) have distinguished between critique as immanent and self-critical, and 'mere criticism' as superficial and unreflexive. Benhabib explains that, for Marx,

> Whilst 'criticism' stands outside the object it criticizes, asserting norms against facts, and the dictates of reason against the unreasonableness of the world, critique refuses to stand outside its object and instead juxtaposes the immanent, normative self-understanding of its object to the material actuality of this object. Criticism privileges an Archimedean standpoint, be it freedom or reason, and proceeds to show the unfreedom or unreasonableness of the world when measured against this ideal paradigm. By privileging this Archimedean standpoint, criticism becomes dogmatism: it leaves its own standpoint unexplained, or it assumes the validity of its standpoint prior to engaging in the task of criticism. This means that criticism is not ready to apply to itself the criteria it applies to its object. Mere criticism lacks self-reflection, for it stops short of asking itself whether its own normative standards cannot be

> juxtaposed to the facts by yet another critical critique, and whether its own reason cannot be shown to be equally unreasonable. (1986 33)

Although Benhabib's exposition arises from Marxism, it points to a problematic shared by all attempts to think 'beyond' and yet 'within' an existing society. It also raises the question of whether critique within human geography is sufficiently self-reflective. No definitive answer can be given to this question, partly because the way we judge the exercise of self-reflection is itself politically and culturally contingent and partly because of the diverse nature of human geography. But another reason we might pause before applying a rigid distinction between criticism and critique is that the difference between the two is not, in practice, as clear as Benhabib implies. After all, anyone who seeks to question and understand a phenomenon must be able, if only momentarily or partially, to imaginatively grasp, define and, hence, 'stand outside the object [he or she] criticizes'. Nevertheless, however limited the results, the challenge and ethic of self-reflection remain vital to the survival of intellectual life. This chapter suggests that today this challenge can and should be taken one further step and applied to the politicisation of critique.

There is a danger in running together words like 'radical', 'left-wing' and 'progressive' that the differences between the traditions that are thus labelled are lost from view (for a discussion of their differences, see Williams 1983). It is worth recalling that, in the mid-late nineteenth century, radicalism was widely understood in Britain as a more combative form of liberalism. It was associated with a cross-class, populist agenda. British socialists of the period were often fierce critics of radicalism (see Hobsbawm 1974). During the same period, the term 'progressive' was claimed by both radicals and socialists although, within the socialist camp, it was contested by nostalgic revolutionaries such as William Morris (see Bonnett 2010 for discussion). All of these terms had a complicated subsequent history. 'Radicalism' was deployed by some sections of the left as a marker of distinctly bold forms of political commitment. Thus, for example, a distinction was made between radical and socialist feminists in the late 1960s, a distinction premised on the idea that the former offered a politics of anti-patriarchy and sexual difference whilst the latter viewed feminism as one part of a wider anti-capitalist struggle. More generally, 'radicalism' in the twentieth century came to evoke a range of anti-authoritarian political forms (including anti-racism, feminism, libertarianism, queer politics and environmentalism) that have been aligned to but also often critical of the 'traditional' left. Much of the work of critical geographers from the past two decades follows this radical tradition. Nevertheless, the terms 'radical', 'left-wing' and, occasionally, 'progressive', tend to be used rather loosely and interchangeably within human geography (and this is the way I use them in this chapter). To add to the complexity of the situation, this broad and diverse 'radical' body of opinion often overlaps but also conflicts with a 'liberal' tradition which is based upon a concern for social exclusion and inequality but explicitly eschews revolutionary and/or radical claims (see for example Ley 1982). Moreover, both radicalism and the idea of critique are stronger in some fields of geography (such as political, cultural and social geography) than in others (such as quantitative and environmental geography).

What this means in practice is that to attempt a critique of critique within human geography is inevitably to trade in generalisations and tread on more than a few toes. It relies on the plausibility of my overall theses as well the idea that there does exist a broad community of interpretation that can be labelled, however roughly, as 'radical'. The existence of such a broad community of debate is suggested by the way *Antipode: A Journal of Radical Geography* defines its aim, which is to publish essays that 'further the analytical and political

goals of a broad-based Left-wing geography. The perspective can be Marxist, post-Marxist, feminist, anti-racist, queer, anarchist or green' (*Antipode* 2012a). The breadth of this community is also indicated by the fact that on *Antipode*'s weblinks page, which is titled 'Left/radical publications', readers can click through to a journal associated with post-structuralist work, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (*Antipode* 2012b). As one would expect within any community of debate there has been lively argument within it. Debate has taken place not only between Marxists and heterodox radicals (see for example Massey 1991; McDowell 1992) but in response to the work of geographers who have sought to expose particular aspects of the conservative and exclusionary nature of the discipline and global power dynamics (for example Bonnett 1997; Sidaway 2000). Yet despite this diversity, there are shared assumptions and interests that connect these scholars. I would pick out three key common characteristics. The first is an emphasis on the political. More specifically, this group tends to interpret social change politically, often framing it in terms of resistance and struggle against conservatism and/or capitalism. Second, it places itself within interconnected lineages of political work centred upon issues of emancipation, structural exclusion, revolution and/or reform (for example, anarchism, socialism, feminism and anti-colonialism). Third, it prioritises the political values of liberation and equality. Many radicals also exhibit a fourth characteristic, namely that they identify the socio-economic forms that came to be associated with Euro-American industrial and colonial power (notably, Western capitalism, Western racism and, sometimes, modernity itself) as the appropriate target for radical critique.

II The rise of critique

Some form of critique can probably be found in all societies at all times. Nevertheless, its rise to social prominence -- to a position, for example, where it is an expected facet of a good education -- is geographically and historically specific. Critique prospers when a society is able to move from unquestioned and traditional forms of authority to more conflictual, politicised and diverse forms of authority. Hence, the story of the rise of critique is the story of the rise of modernity. Shmuel Eisenstadt defines the 'central core' of modernity as, 'an unprecedented openness and uncertainty' (2002, 28-29; see also Eisenstadt 1999, 2000). He proceeds to define 'openness' in terms of the contestation of identities and institutions. Although Eisenstadt anchors this process in Western modernity, his research focus has been upon how it has interacted with non-Western forms of modernity. Such a global vision is a necessary corrective to the kind of history that roots the development of critique in the uniquely advanced and reflexive West. Foucault's explanation of the rise of critique is, by comparison, narrowly European in focus. Nevertheless, he is able to add theoretical and historical depth to the argument that modernity stimulated a culture of critique. Foucault roots the transition from tradition and towards critique in the sixteenth century expansion and social penetration of government and bureaucracy. This expansion he refers to as 'governmentalization'.

> governmentalization ... cannot apparently be dissociated from the question 'how not to govern' ... I mean that in this preoccupation about the way to govern and the search for the ways to govern, we identify a perpetual question which would be: 'how not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them'. And if we accord this movement of govermentalization of both society and individuals the historic dimension and breadth which I believe it has had, it seems that

> one could approximately locate therein what we could call the critical attitude. (2007 44)

Foucault is clearly extolling the value of critique, its democratic necessity. But so far his terms are broad: critique is associated with politicisation but not with any one particular political tradition. However, a little later in his lecture Foucault begins to introduce the categories of discourse, truth and power.

> [C]ritique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and questions power on its discourses of truth. Well then!: critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth. (47)

With this passage Foucault's argument changes tone and begins to connect with a more particular political constituency. An analytical argument has become shot through with the muscular language of 'insubordination'. And although Foucault does not make his politics explicit in 'What is critique?', his call to question 'power' and 'discourses of truth' is given bite and purpose by his readers' assumption that such categories flow out of his social libertarian political commitments (Foucault elaborates this relationship in Foucault 1982).

The identification of critique with radicalism is not a natural or inevitable process but emerged from a particular history. By the time of Foucault's lecture in 1978 this association was already entrenched. To explain why is beyond the scope of this chapter but two key influences need to be mentioned. The first is the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt; the second, the rise after the Second World War of anti-colonialism and radicalism. Founded in 1923, the 'Frankfurt School' was home to a number of Marxist thinkers who developed an influential model of critique as 'critical theory' (see, for example, Adorno and Horkheimer 1979; see Jay 1996, for discussion). Referring specifically to Adorno's defence of critique as an oppositional tradition, Tim Dant (2003) explains that he defined it, not simply in terms of a critical assessment, but as way of challenging whole social systems.

> critique means not only fault finding but setting up a line of opposition, one that deals not just with the detail but rather with the whole system. Faults are not the result of mistakes, correctable once they are pointed out, but are the result of the workings of established systems. Critique begins to challenge whole systems rather than identify failings. A critique of society confronts the form of society as a whole, perhaps identifying particular features but treating them as consequent upon the underlying character of the social system. (2003 7)

The 'social system' which the Frankfurt School sought to challenge was capitalism, authoritarian modernity and the 'culture industry'. Dant is a little coy in the passage above about naming the politics of critical theory. It is not any 'social system' or just any 'whole society' that was the focus of critical theory but particular societies at a particular time. Without making this explicit we cannot grasp either the motivation or the content of Frankfurt School critique. Indeed, without this information we will find it difficult to understand why Dant proceeds to distinguish the Frankfurt School as producing critique from other thinkers who he implies did not, even though they had a similarly wide interest in 'whole systems'. Thus, for example, Dant contrasts the Frankfurt School and subsequent

radical French and German critical theory from the sociology of Weber and Simmel. He notes that both men

> had little discernible impact on the critical theory tradition that I will address. This is for two reasons: Weber and Simmel engage in a form of sociology that would not claim to be 'critique', and neither takes the mode of production as of prime importance in understanding the relationship between culture and society. (5)

Dant's focus on what the sociology of Weber and Simmel would 'claim' [sic] might appear puzzling (along with this notion that it had no 'discernible impact' on critical theory). Both men produced wide-ranging and highly critical explanations of the crises of modernity. Dant wants to tell us that these theories are not critique because they were not explicitly claimed as such. Yet, given that the term appears to have been relatively uncommon when they were writing (a generation before the Frankfurt School), the absence of this claim is not particularly revealing. It is because critique has come to be aligned with 'a line of opposition' (Dant 7) associated with Marxist and other radical perspectives, that Dant is led to conclude that Weber and Simmel were not interested in producing it.

What we are witness to here is not the absence of critique outside of one political tradition but, rather, its identification with one political tradition. The influence of the Frankfurt School enabled this process but it was the wider, post-Second World War, rise of anti-colonialism and radicalism, both in academia and beyond, that secured it. When Frantz Fanon's *L'An Cinq de la Révolution Algérienne* appeared in 1959 it seemed to be part of an unstoppable tide of anti-colonial socialist liberation. Translated as *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, the publisher's blurb on the first English edition (1965) proclaims that this is a work that 'has much to say to a world dominated by revolutionary movements in the underdeveloped countries'. Introducing the book, Adolfo Gilly tells his readers that 'Revolution is mankind's way of life today. This is the age of revolution; the "age of indifference" is gone forever' (1965 1). Within this context, the political direction of critique was clear. It was made more so by the rise of the New Left student movement, a rise that eventually had a significant impact upon the political profile of social science and humanities departments. Russell Jacoby has argued that 'it was not the New Left intellectuals who invaded the universities but the reverse' (2000 141). But, although the currents of influence ran both ways, it remains the case that, by the early 1970s, the idea of critique had been established as a key term within the lexicon of a new generation of radical academics.

Within geography the rise of critique is probably best introduced by reference to the emergence of Marxist geography. This emergence was famously symbolised by the transition from liberal to socialist formulations undertaken by David Harvey in the two parts of his book *Social Justice and the City* (2009, first published 1973). It is also a transition, for Harvey, from the uncritical to the critical and self-awareness. The 'essential task at hand' Harvey explains,

> is nothing more or less than the self-conscious and aware construction of a new paradigm for social geographic thought through a deep and profound critique of our existing analytical constructs. (145)

The rise of critique in geography can also be exemplified by reference to Derek Gregory's *Ideology, Science and Human Geography* (1978). This work provides one of the most theoretically wide-ranging deployments of the radical tradition on a geographical terrain, and

also represents, more than Harvey's more interdisciplinary and oppositional contributions, the reshaping of human geography as a discipline structured around progressive aspirations. *Ideology, Science and Human Geography* may also be used to illustrate the contention that this transition was accompanied by the construction of a pre-critical past for geography. The book is organised around the idea that geography must move from a non-critical paradigm, which Gregory identifies as positivism and spatial science, towards 'critical social science', a term which he identifies with (but does not conflate with) the legacy of the Frankfurt School (76). This imperative is not offered merely as a moral or political choice. Gregory argues that it is because of recent 'social crisis' that 'the academic social sciences – including geography – have been obliged to incorporate some kind of critical analysis into their syllabuses' (50).

For Gregory geographers had, until recently (that is, until the 1970s), uncritically adhered to an intellectual tradition which he rooted in the legacy of Comte. Gregory recognised Comte as a figure of the 'critical Enlightenment' (27) but it is in his pursuit of a value-free science of society (positivism) that he locates his influence on geography. Gregory contrasts 'committed explanation in geography' with the positivism and empiricism he associates both with most twentieth century geography and the 'myth of value-free geography' (71). Linking the tradition of critique to Jurgen Habermas, the most important later figure in the Frankfurt tradition, Gregory argues that 'critical science' has 'its own knowledge-constitutive interest: it is committed to emancipation' (70). He proceeds to explain that in geography,

> Most of the critiques [of spatial science] have been explicitly tied to an emancipatory interest which, if it owes little to a reading of Habermas (and I do not say that this is essential), is broadly conformable with his project ... to realize what Marx once called 'man in the whole wealth of his being, man richly and deeply alive'; that is, to overcome the alienation of contemporary science and contemporary society. A genuinely critical geography has to recognise the necessary connections between these two if it is to have any practical efficacy, and a continued commitment to [a technical conception of science] makes this impossible. (72)

Thus the rise of critique in human geography is also the ascent of political commitment in human geography. There have been a variety of sceptical accounts of this tendency towards politicisation in particular fields of the discipline (for example, Corbridge 1986; Ley 1982), as well as alternative ideological projects (on the influence of Rostow's (1960) 'non-communist' account of economic 'stages of growth' see Keeble 1968). However, the profound impact of radical ideas on mainstream debate can be seen by the fact that, in 1998, Peet was able to summarise the general trends within the discipline in his student textbook *Modern Geographical Thought* (1998) largely in terms of debates between different constituencies of radicals. Indeed, he notes that,

> By the end of the 1970s, Marxism had an almost hegemonic position, not necessarily in the discipline as a whole, where the teaching of 'geographic facts' continued largely unabated for many years, and graduate students were still made to slave over 'quantitative techniques', but in those leading sectors where new ideas are formed and discussed on a daily basis.

It is an overview founded in the intellectual hegemony it seeks to depict. The derisive tone (and use of scare quotes) Peet deploys to depict the 'unabated' teaching of '"geographical facts"', and the students forced to 'slave over "quantitative techniques"', are set against 'the leading sectors' and 'new ideas'. Peet does not award much intellectual respect to the

traditions he sees as being overturned by Marxism. In his hands, critique is a heavy roller used to flatten the opposition. And, although Peet's particular representation of quantitative methods are not typical of the views of many within the discipline (see, for example, Sheppard 1991), the point at issue is not whether his views on quantitative methods are representative but why it is that the only avenue for the development of critique that is left open within *Modern Geographical Thought* is for positions that claim to be just as, or more, radical than Marxism. It is a narrative that demands that theoretical debate within contemporary human geography is played out as a political event staged within a community of radical scholars. Peet notes that 'Marxist geography itself was ripe for an anti-hegemonic critique by the early 1980s' (111). He fleshes out this challenge with an account of the schism between the orthodox Marxism of Harvey and the libertarian identity-politics introduced by postmodernism.

> Harvey's passionate defence of Marxism, his dismissive attitude towards structurationist modifications, and his early critique of postmodern notions of difference ... did not bode well for relations between the various components of the left in geography – Marxists, realists, structurationists, and a growing camp of postmodernists – who from this time came to regard each other with a growing hostility. The journal *Society and Space*, which carries much of the new work, became increasingly differentiated from *Antipode* , which remains largely Marxist in orientation; indeed, *Society and Space* refuses to carry Marxist articles. (189)

Peet's portrait of inimical factions is, perhaps, overplayed (as noted earlier, the *Antipode* website links to *Society and Space* under its list of 'Left/radical publications'; though see the mission statement of *Human Geography: A New Radical Journal* 2012). However, whilst Peet's tone may be unusually militant, the fact that, in a key student textbook, the story of academic geography can find itself narrated in such a way is a telling indication of how deeply the politicisation of critique has shaped the discipline. Noting that 'the likes of Derek Gregory, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Neil Smith and Michael Watts' have now 'topped the citation charts' , Noel Castree writes that 'Leftist geography has insinuated itself into the very heart of the discipline' (2000 958). To his list may be added the names of younger radical scholars, including Castree himself, who have sustained and advanced human geography as 'critical social science'.

III Narratives of critique in human geography

In this section I explore some examples of: a) how the conflation of critique with radical/left critique has shaped particular research topics and agendas; and b), how the construction of critique in particular fields within human geography has been premised on the construction on a pre-critical past. I provide four case studies. The first two turn on particular texts (Jackson's *Maps of Meaning*, 1989 and my own 'Constructions of 'race', place and discipline: geographies of 'racial' identity and racism', 1996) which I use to illustrate both of the themes just mentioned (a and b). My third example (Hickey and Lawson's 'Beyond science? human geography, interpretation and critique', 2005) is also a single text concerned with a particular topic of research, but my analysis is limited to an argument about the way the authors rely on unexamined political assumptions. The fourth case study (the critical post-colonial literature in geography) is designed to open out my discussion beyond single texts to show how a sub-field has developed as a community of radical critique. These examples have been chosen because they all describe the state of a particular field within human geography whilst also providing interventions that seek to guide and shape future developments within that field. Moreover, although these four examples are not designed to provide a

representative survey of critique within their area of expertise they are illustrative of widespread tendencies. These tendencies are especially apparent within, but are not limited to, social, cultural, political and development geography. As this implies, whilst a great deal of the work that occurs in quantitative, economic, historical and environmental geography could be used to provide counter examples, to explore the rise and nature of critique in human geography it is necessary to encounter what might be called 'the radical paradigm'.

As we have already seen with reference to generalist human geography examples, the story of the rise of critique in human geography has sometimes been premised on an account of the discipline's pasts as pre-critical. It is a back-story that has been equally central to the narration of the story of the specific fields within the discipline. A nice example is Peter Jackson's influential book *Maps of Meaning* (1989). This work is widely acknowledged as a central text in the 'cultural turn'. But it is, in many ways, a 'political turn' that Jackson places at the heart of his project. The necessity of dragging geography out of the past is made clear by his portraits of 'traditional' figures and research agendas, as the following account of the cultural geography Carl Sauer makes clear:

> Sauer betrayed an anti-modernist tendency that went hand-in-hand with a fundamentally conservative outlook. .... Sauer's inherent conservatism never seems to have troubled his students for whom the 'Old Man's ideas took on the status of common sense ... The current agenda of cultural geography in the United States is still dominated by Sauer's original concerns with rural, vernacular and folk themes. While it shows a respect for tradition and a fascination with diversity, it also betrays a reactionary attitude towards social and cultural change. (16-17)

Political ideas provide the intellectual momentum for Jackson's account of Sauer. The 'Old Man''s conservatism is 'inherent' and 'reactionary' and its survival today represented as an unfortunate anachronism. What this kind of narrative provides us with is an exciting sense of a changing sub-discipline. Readers who do not want to be called 'reactionary' (which is surely most of us) are left in no doubt about how they should approach Sauer. Yet different kinds of critical perspective are possible. One could, for example, address the critical content in Sauer's work, which emerged, in part, from opposition to environmental determinism and positivism and, perhaps, even find parallels between his nostalgia for folk themes with the nostalgia for unalienated labour that shapes the Marxist tradition. After all, as recent revisionist accounts suggest, rather than being a despatchable sin of earlier generations, nostalgia and 'conservatism', can be seen as an inherent component of all modern political ideologies (Fritzche 2002; Bonnett, 2010). The point is that there are many other ways that critique could be applied, either to draw Sauer into a debate with the present or to challenge his influence.

Maps of Meaning is a political book and its critique of the past is a political one. '[T]he 'new' cultural geography', which Jackson champions, 'has an insistently critical, political edge' (8). When contemporary cultural geographers talk about a 'critical, political edge' they do not need to spell out what tradition that politics will follow: radicalism has become the common sense of the field and the discipline. As we saw with Peet, 'debate' thus becomes a conversation between different radical positions about which is the more radical. The new cultural geography is defended by Jackson, not simply as a political advance on Sauer, but against the charge of a, now older, generation of radical geographers that its focus on culture and identity represents 'a caving in of political will' (Harvey, cited by Jackson 7). The new cultural geography, Jackson argues, keeps the radical flame burning.

> there is nothing inherently conservative about cultural studies, even among those who choose to examine 'elite' sources, as Raymond Williams' work proudly attests ... While cultural studies may be dismissed by some people as a reactionary diversion, to others it offers an important domain for political debate, having provided new grounds for collective struggle. Cora Kaplan's work provides a model here, suggesting that struggles around cultural definitions of gender and race have generated much political energy during the 1980s ... But neither Greenham Common nor the Brixton riots have eclipsed traditional forms of class struggle. Traditional struggles have simply been expressed in other ways and with unpredicted consequences. For example, a 'typical' working-class confrontation, such as the 1984-5 miners' strike, had significant 'cultural' effects, not least in challenging the persistence if patriarchal gender relations. (7)

My second example (my own essay 'Constructions of 'race', place and discipline: geographies of 'racial' identity and racism' 1999) brings us back to the way critique has been premised on the construction of a pre-critical past. I turn to this essay because it claims to offer a survey of the evolution of what used to be called 'racial geography' and is now more likely to be termed geographies of racialization. I admit that I did not give much thought to my premise that the field had moved from an unsophisticated, pre-critical past to a critical and politically engaged present. It is, after all, a perspective that can easily appear obvious to contemporary scholars. Moreover, it is one that suggests that geography's pasts are a bit dull and should not detain us too long: once acknowledged and broadly depicted we can move quickly along to the era of critique. The article is also illustrative of how, once the distant past (in this case the early twentieth century) is established as pre-critical and conservative, all echoes of it in later generations can be critiqued as symptoms of an inability to wrest the discipline from the mire of the past. Hence I explained that not only did geographies of 'race' used to be empiricist and deploy essentialist notions of 'race' but that these characteristics persisted into the era of 'race relations' research and were only finally confronted by the kind of social constructionist and cultural materialist agendas spearheaded by Jackson in *Maps of Meaning.* It is a teleological argument. It is also a compelling one. Framing the pre-critical past of the field in terms 'the empiricist tradition' - a 'paradigm ... characterised by a narrow view of the legitimate topics of geographical 'racial' inquiry and by a reliance on quantitative methodologies' (136) - allowed me to chart an ascent, a journey upwards and onwards. It also had the advantage of meaning that I did not have to delve too deeply into the complex past of 'racial geography'. Instead I was able to sum it up neatly and despatch it thus:

> 'racial geography' was not merely a well established sub-discipline but at the core of the subject; its theoretical assumptions and global perspective permeating both its physical and human braches. The political and intellectual axis of this dominance revolved around the imputed influence of the physical environment upon the social and intellectual characteristics of different 'races' ... Thus, we find geographers of the period enumerating the nature and movements of different 'races' and plotting and quantifying their migratory and mental potentials. (137-138)

This account is framed and shaped by the teleological imperative to deliver a reactionary past which a critical, progressive present can define itself in relation to. It relies both on an instrumental attitude to the past (i.e., it is not something complex, that demands exploration, but something to be *used* for present ends) and a lack of knowledge of it. One would not gather from my account that 'racial geography' was shot through with controversies

concerning the extent and the validity of environmental determinism nor indeed that, far from being a secure category, the 'race' concept was being challenged across a range of disciplines in the early twentieth century (Barkan, 1992). One would certainly not have guessed that some early critics deployed environmental determinism against 'race', and against racial prejudice, on the basis that it proved that 'races' were not fixed but mutable and fundamentally equal (Finot, undated; first published 1905). A generalising and stereotyping approach to the past can also be found in my blanket depiction of the mid-century ('[b]etween 1940 and 1960'):

> this period represents a time of stagnation rather than the development of any explicit critique of the assumptions and methodology of 'racial geography' ... Thus when 'race' was 'rediscovered' by British geographers in the 1960s, it was interpreted from within an unbroken empiricist tradition. ... Instead of being subjected to scrutiny, 'racial geography's' essentialist notions of 'race' were, albeit unconsciously, reproduced and reworked as part of the common sense of an intellectually highly conservative discipline. (137-138)

This account of 'stagnation' denies the possibility that 'explicit critique' could take place in the absence of the kind of social constructionist and cultural materialist challenges that the author is clearly keen to turn to. Thus the expansion of research on ethnic spatial clustering in the 1960s is highlighted only to be thrown under a cloud of suspicion. Indeed, the way the argument is expressed implies that geographers were actually attracted to anti-critical and essentialist perspectives: 'geographers have tended to be drawn', I wrote, 'to theoretically nave, highly empiricist, and 'racially' essentialist, forms of 'race' relations research and training' (140).

One of the paradoxes of the conflation of critique with a particular political tradition is that the politics of representation become unmarked. In practice this has meant that what is understood to be a progressive position is given an objective character. Although this process is evident in the two examples already discussed I will explore it further by way of a third, Hickey and Lawson's (2005) chapter in the book *Questioning Geography* (Castree, Rogers and Sherman 2005), titled 'Beyond science? human geography, interpretation and critique'. This essay first caught my attention a few years ago because it is, in part, about the idea of human overpopulation. I had recently completed an article on this topic (Bonnett 2009) which argued that concerns about overpopulation were taken more seriously in the Global South than in the West (as seen in the spread and advocacy of population policies outside the West; see, for example Aird 1982; Hoodfar and Assadpour 2000). I went on to suggest that since each person consumes much more in the West than in other parts of the world, the impact of population size on the environment needs to be taken more seriously in the West than it currently is. The piece was, in part, a challenge, from a Green perspective, to what it presented as the conventional Marxian position that overpopulation is a not a real issue compared to the unequal distribution of land and wealth. I mention this article because it discloses the fact that I have an interest in this debate but also because it demonstrates that this is a contested topic, even amongst radicals, and that the origins of concern about overpopulation have multiple roots. Hickey and Lawson suggest, however, that there is only one authentic 'critical perspective'. Thus, for example, they write that, '[i]n contrast' to attempts to see hunger as a 'technical problem' caused by overpopulation,

> from a critical perspective, hunger must be understood in terms of uneven access to resources ... and the ability of different groups to have an effective voice in defining both key issues and alternative ways of addressing them' (108).

What a 'critical perspective' *must* do is thus imited to one particular viewpoint. The idea of overpopulation is, by contrast, denied critical content by Hickey and Lawson. They argue that it is a myth invented by the neo-colonial West and imposed on the Global South in order to grab power and control over resources. Those who are concerned about population size are characterised by Hickey and Lawson as looking on the Global South as,

> busting at the borders and filled with people of unbridled fertility. This enduring Western representation is fuelled on a number of fronts by anxieties over immigration to the USA and Europe from the Global South, and by environmental rhetorics that associate 'overpopulation' with environmental degradation. (106)

This portrait is offered by Hickey and Lawson as representative of what they repeatedly refer to as the 'mainstream' and 'dominant' position.

> The tenacity of the 'overpopulation' story is found not only in Western popular cultures, but also in the mainstream development 'industry' ... We question why this belief that problems of hunger and poverty are the result of 'overpopulation' in the face of abundant evidence to the contrary continues to be so widespread and persistent. (106)

The idea that overpopulation is a 'story' is established by Hickey and Lawson by reference to the 'fact' that population size has been proved not to be a problem. Thus rather than acknowledge that their argument is a political one and that it emerges from a particular political tradition, Hickey and Lawson suggest what they are doing is simply speaking truth to power. They explain that links between poverty and population size 'have been refuted' (107) in Tim Mitchell's (1991) work on neo-colonisation in Egypt (a book which correlates population growth and rises in agricultural production) and go on to note that,

> a complex problem like hunger (or poverty, or inequality, or fertility) results from the intersection of geo-political and economic power shaping material circumstances ... This richer analysis considers international commercial food interests, food aid tied to political agendas such as changing diets and opening markets in the West, and class and gender politics. (108)

This analysis is offered as 'richer'. But it might also be said that it is politically particular. Yet its political specificity is rendered transparent. Indeed, the authors align their argument with authentic science, suggesting that it reflects not only the true facts but the true spirit of scepticism and reflexive enquiry.

> If the facts don't fit the picture, why does the 'overpopulation' interpretation persist? The answer revolves around issues of power, which mainstream science, based on assumptions of objectivity and universalism, is not designed to measure. By contrast, part of the 'science' of critical human geography is to use the facts to re-question initial assumptions and long-standing explanations. This is a reflexive approach as it locates and situates explanation within a broader social context. (107)

Hickey and Lawson's claim upon authentic "'science"' is based upon their own assumption about what a 'critical perspective' must consist of. Such an approach, they note, 'engages with complex issues around the material and discursive forms and processes of power' and, hence, produces a 'reflexive and rigorous scientific human geography' (106). But scepticism can cut in many different directions. A more generous sense of its possibilities might have encouraged Hickey and Lawson to acknowledge the political tradition from which their 'science' emerges.

Hickey and Lawson's chapter is not offered here as an example of the construction of a pre-critical past but as a case-study of the unacknowledged conflation of critique with a particular political tradition. However, all three of the examples so far discussed cannot be seen in isolation from the dominance of both tendencies across a number of fields of human geography. It is always somewhat unfair to pick out particular authors who are working within an established paradigm: how Jackson, myself, Hickey and Lawson construct critique reflects the assumptions established by a wider intellectual community as well as their own particular agendas. My final illustration is, in part, designed to introduce such a community. It does so by reference to a specific body of geographical work on the impact of and resistance to Western forms of knowledge and modernity. This post-colonial agenda also enables us to explore how the development of a concern with the politics of difference – what one might call the postmodernisation of radical critique – has enabled an alignment of cultural materialism, anti-capitalism and deconstructionist theory. The desire to decentre Western authority has been central to the critique of power offered by post-colonial geographers (Escobar, 2001; Slater, 2002; Mercer, Mohan and Power, 2003; Robinson 2003; 2006). What Müller (2008: 325) depicts as geographers' attempt 'to deconstruct, unravel and expose discourses in order to lay bare the schemes of power operating beneath them', when aligned with an attentiveness to what Slater (1993: 429) terms the 'the South theorises[ing] back', has established a radical agenda that retains the political momentum of Marxism whilst challenging its Eurocentrism. These political and theoretical associations align a disparate group of 'radical' influences, combining and colliding Marxism with a suspicion towards modernity as metanarrative (Lyotard, 1984), an interest in the radical instability of language (Derrida, 1978) and a concern with the discursive production of power (Foucault, 1970). When aligned to anti-colonial agendas these theoretical traditions have encouraged political geographers' to look 'beyond the imperiality of knowledge' (Slater, 2004: 223) and address 'subaltern strategies of localization' (Escobar, 2001). At the centre of these endeavours is the critique of Eurocentric conceptualisations of modernity. Over recent years this critique has led to an interest in the idea of multiple or alternative modernities. Thus, for example, for Mercer, Mohan and Power, the analysis of 'multiple modernities' is part of a 'critical political geography', which 'decentre[s]' Western authority' and allows a 'welcome recentering of "local" knowledges and practices' (2003: 430). Robinson's 'cosmopolitan urban studies' also offers a vision of different modernities as 'diversity rather than hierarchical division' (2006 4). Indeed, Robinson writes of 'the right to be modern, for cities of all kinds' (76). Similarly, when Bonnett tells us that the assertion of 'Asian modernity' registers 'dissatisfaction with Eurocentric visions of the modern' (2005 521; also Carswell 2006) and Massey argues for a progressive view of space as an arena of 'co-eval becomings' (2005 189), multiple modernities are rendered into a politically attractive narrative of resistance and autonomy.

Since critique in post-colonial geography has become so firmly associated with radical politics it is not surprising that these attempts to deconstruct and scatter the concept of modernity have, in turn, been critiqued as not sufficiently or authentically radical. The political suspicion of the 'multiple modernities' agenda as complicit with capitalism and/or

Western power has been a leitmotif of these critical interventions. Hart argues that multiple modernities approaches have offered 'remarkably uncritical – at times even celebratory – visions of the novelty, variety and multiplicity of capitalist modernities' (2002, 817). Hart's focus on the capitalist production of modernities has also been pursued by Watts (2003). For Watts multiple modernities approaches have been guilty of 'hazy utopianism' (440). They offer a wishful perspective, he concludes, in which 'the Third World appears as a monolithic, caricatured and often essentialised realm of at worst normalised subjects and at best hybridized, subaltern emancipatory potential' (440). Watts goes on to offer a neo-liberal context for the growth of interest in plural modernities. '[T]he growing clamour to "provincialise Europe", to see outside and beyond the hegemony of the West', he suggests, is a cultural reflection of footloose and flexible capitalism. This 'clamour', Watts tells us, was fashioned 'in the crucible of ... the neo-liberal "grand slam"' (443). Watts also calls attention to the methodological emphasis on narrative and discourse that characterises many studies in this area. This focus, he argues, 'mistook the word for the world' (449). It relies on 'the vain hope that in the renarrativization of western hegemony (the discovery of alternative modernities) resides a sort of civilisational parity' (449).

Thus critique is challenged by critique. Yet the political impetus and framing of critique is sustained. A shared set of political assumptions provides the structure and the lexicon of critique. In their different ways, all four of the examples introduced here illustrate how change and challenge is interwoven with orthodoxy. Moreover, when taken together with the examples of Harvey and Gregory discussed earlier, they illustrate that this process has been in motion for getting on for fifty years in human geography: that successive generations have developed critiques that use a specific tradition of politics as a common language and bond. The fact that critique is constructed in this way reflects the influence of wider political and intellectual influences, such as the rise of anti-colonialism and the influence of the Frankfurt School. The question arises, can this vision of critique continue? In the next section I address new political and intellectual influences that suggest that its survival is far from assured.

IV The critique of critique

Over the past thirty years the political and intellectual context for critique has changed. The era when Adolfo Gilly could declare that 'Revolution is mankind's way of life today' (1965 1) and be confidant that all his readers knew that 'revolution' meant socialist revolution, is gone. When we have revolutions today their political meaning is far more uncertain. Iran in 1979, the USSR in 1991, Egypt in 2011: all have opened new political avenues but they are not ones that fit easily into the orthodoxies of either the left or the right. Moreover, as political and economic power has shifted, the familiar model of Western capitalism versus 'Third World' resistors has increasingly come to resemble a 'nostalgic fantasy' (Taylor, 2011: 176).

Despite the desire in some quarters to see radicalism as resurgent, as coming back in the wake of the economic chaos of the past few years, the political landscape has changed. Indeed, given the scale of recent crises within capitalism, the revival of left activism has been remarkably modest. In 2000 Perry Anderson accompanied the relaunch of *New Left Review* with a frank admission that the left had been defeated.

> For the first time since the Reformation there are no longer any significant oppositions — that is, systematic rival outlooks — within the thought-world of the West: and scarcely any on a world-scale (2000, 17)

Writing in the same year, Noel Castree, offered a pointed contrast:

> few can ignore the fact that the expansion of the *academic Left* has been coincident, in ways both striking and seemingly contradictory, with the precipitous contraction of the *non-academic Left* in the domains of business, government and civil society. (958)

In part, this paradoxical process has been achieved by the institutionalisation of the academic left (Bonnett 2012). Institutionalisation sustains traditions. It is socially – though not necessarily politically – conservative. The construction of critique discussed in this chapter may offer itself as radical but it has been sustained by the fact that a community of interest has been formed that is able to reproduce itself through its control of journals, departments, promotions and so on (the dilemmas of institutionalised activism have the subject of considerable debate in geography; see, for example, Blomley 2008; Castree 2000; Castree and Sparke 2000; Chatterton 2008; see also Glassman 2009). Another paradox lies in the fact that, although many within this community view themselves as insubordinate to the interests of 'power', the survival of this radical culture may have been facilitated by the aggressively iconoclastic culture of neo-liberal capitalism. In the market place of ideas transgression and boldness are encouraged. Indeed, in their book on the commercialisation of dissent, *The Rebel Sell* (2005, 102), Heath and Potter push the point even further, arguing that 'it is rebellion, not conformity, that has for decades been the driving force of the marketplace'. For Marxists these ideas will seem familiar. The revolutionary nature of capitalism was central to Marx's understanding of both political change and the unconscious political task of the 'British bourgeoisie'. This group, he wrote in 1852, 'cannot avoid fulfilling their mission, battering to pieces Old England' (Marx 1992, 264). The interplay of capitalism and subversion does not mean that the latter is compromised or ineffective (Marx thought the revolution inaugurated by capitalism would destroy capitalism) or that it is appropriate to doubt that radical scholars are motivated by deeply felt convictions and inspiring, normative visions of a better world (on the latter, see Olson and Sayer 2009). However, in our era, when communism has come and gone and capitalism, despite its profound crises, appears entrenched, explaining why one particular interpretation of critique remains so powerful amongst so many human geographers suggests the need for precisely the kind of reflexive investigation of the paradoxes of radicalism promised by immanent critique.

As Giddens has pointed out it is capitalism, not communism, that has proved the most subversive narrative of modernity: the 'Capitalist enterprise … is a disembedding mechanism par excellence, and is powering its way through previously resistant parts of the world just as thoroughly as it ever did' (1994 96). Unlike Marx, whose vision of the 'battering' power of capitalism creating political revolution was a vision of a communist future, Giddens is able to look to the communist past to compare the lived reality of both systems. He concludes that, '[p]aradoxically, state socialism, which saw itself as the prime revolutionary force in history, proved much more accommodating towards tradition than capitalism has been' (96). This last observation may appear puzzling to those with some knowledge of the way the diverse Marxist regimes that came to power during the last century attempted to remake identities and root out traditional loyalties. Deracination was a central technique of communist authority and was taken to violent extremes in both the USSR and China. Yet this very authoritarianism encouraged other forms of conservatism, preserving ideologies, interest

groups and economic practices from critique. Marxism in the twentieth century, as well as being a set of theories, is a set of historical experiences and these experiences were as much about conservatism as they were about radicalism. By century's end, the historical experience of Marxism had seriously weakened the plausibility of the identification of radicalism with critique. It is also pertinent to recall, as Milicevic does, that 'if being radical in the West in the 1960s meant being Marxist, being radical in eastern Europe meant being sceptical towards dominant Marxist ideology' (2001 760).

The crisis of Marxist government has, in part, been responsible for the development of a new revisionist literature that explores the conservative and nostalgic facets of both Marxism and radicalism in general (Fritzche 2002; Bonnett, 2010). This research agenda also provides an opportunity to reassess one of the founding forces of radical critique, the Frankfurt School. For these theorists had a far more complicated relationship to progressive politics than has sometimes been admitted (cf. Stauth and Turner 1988; Shaw 1985). The central text of the School, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is premised on the possibility of 'the redemption of the hopes of the past' (1979 xv). Radicalism is not easily separated out from aspirations - such as human authenticity and unalienated existence – that look to the past in order to look to the future. Despite the lowly and contaminated political status of nostalgia, primitivism and spontaneism were central to the last century's succession of critical and avant-garde cultures. Today the ironies and inconsistencies that flow from the complex mix of aspirations behind radicalism provide a rich field of historical scholarship. David Lowenthal's cheeky intervention in the 'Nostalgia strand' of the 'History Workshop 20' conference in 1985, was an early sign of the changing mood. In his counter-orthodox chapter in *The Imagined Past*, the edited volume which emerged out of these sessions (Shaw and Chase 1989), Lowenthal offers a gently mocking portrait of the mood of gleeful nostalgia bashing yet cannot resist turning the tables on these assumptions by pointing out that the idea of a 'History Workshop' is itself laden with nostalgia: an attempt at 'validating our endeavour by linking it with olden horney-handed toil' (28).

The increasing vulnerability of the radical paradigm to challenge may also be seen in theoretical interventions that have called into question the plausibility of combining a critical and political ethic. This point is central to Bruno Latour's article on the topic, a paper titled 'Why has critique run out of steam?' (Latour 2004). Latour's article is politically unspecific but offers a wide-ranging mediation on the failure of academic critique of 'keep up' with the world:

> Would it be so surprising, after all, if intellectuals were also one war late, one critique late ... It has been a long time, after all, since intellectuals were in the vanguard ... We are still able to go through the motions of a critical avant-garde, but is not the spirit gone?'(226)

Latour also expresses a concern that critique is too negative an ambition:

> Is it really the task of the humanities to add deconstruction to destruction? More iconoclasm to iconoclasm? ... Is it really possible to transform the critical urge in the ethos of someone who *adds* reality to matters of fact and not *subtract* reality? To put it another way, what's the difference between deconstruction and constructivism? (225/232)

However, much of the power of Latour's critique of critique centres on his unpacking of its undisclosed normative content. Latour addresses this point by considering what he presents as a paradox, namely that by relativising all knowledge anti-essentialist and social constructionist critique has undermined the possibility of radical critique. Referring to the 'fact' of global warming Latour claims that,

> dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save lives ... Why does it burn my tongue to say that global warming is a fact whether you like it or not? ...what if explanations resorting automatically to power, society, discourse had outlived their usefulness and deteriorated to the point of now feeding the most gullible sort of critique. (227/229-230)

Latour explains his concern in more depth in the following passage, which it is necessary to cite at length. He uses the term 'antifetishists' to refer to both anti-essentialists and social constructionists.

> Antifetishists debunk objects they don't believe in by showing the productive and projective forces of people; without ever making the connection, they use objects they do believe in to resort to the causalist or mechanist explanation and debunk conscious capacities of people whose behaviour they don't approve of. The whole rather poor trick that allows critique to go on, although we would never confine our own valuables to their sordid pawnshop, is that there is never any *crossover between the two lists of objects* in the fact position and the fairy position. This is why you can be at once and without sensing any contradiction (1) an antifestishist for everything you don't believe in – for the most part religion, popular culture, art, politics, and so on; (2) an unrepentant positivist for all the sciences you believe in – sociology, economics, conspiracy theory, genetics, evolutionary psychology, semiotics, just pick your preferred fields of study; and (3) a perfectly healthy sturdy realist for what you really cherish – and of course it might be criticism itself, but also painting, bird-watching, Shakespeare, baboons, proteins, and so on. (240-241)

The fact that Latour's last set of examples are so delightfully innocent – bird-watching and baboons – may reflect his background as a historian of science. However, they are too artfully eclectic to be appropriate for human geography, where constructionist critique has tended to be targeted at what are understood to be politically conservative forms (for example, state borders, nations, race and colonialism). In an earlier essay I argued that the political momentum of social construction relies on the constructionist leaving some categories unexamined.

> The intellectual strain between constructionist theory and politics encourages the paradigm's adherents to 'ring fence' or 'bracket off' categories deemed to be 'egalitarian' and 'progressive' from rigorous critique. Thus, for example, notions of 'equality', 'racism' and 'antiracism' tend to appear in constructionist work, not as objects for scrutiny, or as explicitly strategic essences, but as taken-for –granted foundations, providing 'common-sense' moral and political coherence and direction. (Bonnett 1999 149)

In an interesting statement from an edited collection exploring the social construction of national identities, Jackson and Penrose (1993 3), whilst maintaining that 'no constructions

are more intrinsically 'real' than others'', noted that 'some constructions may be more defensible than others (according to our humanly constructed powers of persuasion and legitimisation)'. Yet, as Latour implies, the 'defensibility' of something and claims to its authenticity must at some point collide. The ethic of critique and of political commitment are not the same thing. Indeed, the one eats into the other. The necessity of the critic to place valued and privileged ideas as far away as possible from the omnivorous appetite of critique is fully understood by one of the principal scholars of anti-essentialism, Diana Fuss.

> the strength of the constructionist position is its rigorous insistence on the production of social categories like 'the body' and its attention to systems of representation. But this strength is not built on the grounds of essentialism's demise, rather it works its power by strategically deferring the encounter with essence, displacing it, in this case, onto the concept of sociality. (1989 6)

So we have arrived at two problems for critique, the one political and the other intellectual. The enabling context for the politicisation of critique is no longer as powerful as it once was. Moreover, the paradoxes of critique are now being opened up by a generation of scholars who have grown up with critique and approach it, not as a novel challenge to the status-quo, but as an academic orthodoxy. Yet none of these critics want to do away with critique. Rather they want to open it up, make it more imaginative and more intellectually wide-ranging.

V The possibilities of critique

In the interest of full disclosure I should acknowledge the fact that I have specific political affiliations and interests. Until the mid-1990s I called myself an anarchist and was in various groups. Now I am a Green (I have stood several times as a Green Party candidate at local elections). Moreover, much of my academic work may be placed, albeit awkwardly, within the radical tradition (Bonnett 1993; 2010). In challenging the radicalisation and politicisation of the idea of critique I am, in part, challenging myself. Why? Partly out of a sense of frustration that what once was daring is now conventional; that this language and these stances have become formulaic. But also out of the hope that, as the 'world discipline' (Bonnett 2008), geography should be open to plurality and new horizons. It should at least be clear that in claiming to want to open critique to further self-reflection and a greater diversity of traditions I not arguing for the displacement of radicalism or to urge an environmentalist agenda. To use Benhabib's terms, such arguments would turn my critique of critique into 'mere criticism'. My argument also encourages the recognition of the instability of ideological identities. For, as the activist-scholar Paul Chatterton (2006, p269; see also Chatterton 2008) recognises, 'We all display multiple, hybrid identities—being radical and conformist, activist and worker, purist and hypocrite, left and right. We also maintain different identities in different contexts'. Although Chatterton's dualisms are questionable (the 'purist'/'hypocrite', 'radical'/ 'conformist' binaries suggest an invitation to auto-critique rather than the acknowledgement of a chronic dilemma) they point to the multiple and interconnected nature of sources of critique. Moreover, they hint at the fact that politics does not exhaust critique. There are psychological, legal, aesthetic, scientific, philosophical, environmental and many other forms of critique available. None of these offer any kind of resolution of the kind of crisis of critique described by Latour. At the same time the possibility that the issues raised by such agendas will be taken seriously (for example, the challenge of climate change) may be strengthened if they are not subsumed within the conventions of 'the left' and 'the right'.

As this implies, although many of these alternative forms of critique can found within the corpus of contemporary human geography, they are often overshadowed by the kind of control of the critical imagination described in this chapter. A larger and more self-critical and generous landscape of critique would not see the disappearance of radical perspectives but it would bring them into contact with positions that sometimes have an equally cogent explanation of geographical phenomena. The task then is to link critique back to the necessity of self-reflection as well as to scatter and reconnect it with the wider world. Over recent years this process has, in part, begun through the development of literatures that offer themselves as critique yet have an ambiguous, questioning relationship to radical orthodoxies. One of the most sophisticated examples has emerged from work on geographies of affect. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the concerns of this literature, specifically its attention to intimate, small and intangible moments, without appreciating how these contrast with the declarative and polemical style that is often favoured in radical work. It is, in part, in the crisis of the latter, the crisis of critique as it is presently performed, that we find the provocation for the 'affective turn'. In the preface of *Non-representational Theory* Thrift (2008) sets out this context.

> In days when the Iraq War, Afghanistan, 9/11, 7/7 and other such events often seem to have claimed total occupation of the Western academic psyche, and many academics have reacted accordingly with mammoth statements about warfare, imperialism, capitalism, global warming, and numerous other waypoints on the road to perdition, it is difficult to remember that other kinds of political impulse might also have something to say, something smaller and larger, something which is in danger of being drowned out. Instead this book keeps faith with the small but growing number of determined experimentalists who think that too often we have been asking the wrong questions in the wrong way: those who want to rematerialize democracy, those who want to think about the exercise of association, those who want to make performances in the interstices of everyday life, those who are intent on producing new and more challenging environments, those who want to redesign everyday things, those who, in other words, want to generate more space to be unprecedented, to love what aids fantasy, and so to gradually break down imaginative resistance. (vii)

It is an interesting statement for it shows that, whilst Thrift wishes to pull away from some of the conventions that have come to structure radical work, this paradigm continues to shape his thinking. Hence, Thrift encourages an interpretation of 'non-representational theory' as enabling a kind of micro version of radical politics. More specifically, it is offered to us as an emancipatory practice of the imagination and play; a form that echoes the concerns (and somewhat tortured relationship with the left) of what Peter Bürger (1984) analysed as the 'historical avant-garde' (early forms of which included Dada and surrealism). The attraction to a vocabulary of 'power', 'materialism' and 'materialities' that we find across the new literature on affect (see also Saldanha 2007; Dawney 2011) also allow this work to echo traditional political concerns even as it tries to 'break down imaginative resistance' (Thrift 2008 vii).

Yet whichever way critique develops, it is likely to bear the imprint of the radical tradition. It is a legacy and a heritage that can sometimes seem a little wheezy with age. But there is also much that is enabling in this history. The radical ethic of reflexivity and liberation continues to push against conventions, even its own. With the crisis of radical critique the value of

critique becomes not less but more visible. But it is also a crisis that is opening up critique to a world of possibilities.

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